



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2015

No. 48

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Sovereign God, Your kingdom cannot be shaken, for You are King of kings and Lord of lords. Thank You for inviting us to ask and receive, to seek and find, and to knock for doors to open. Lord, forgive us when we have forfeited Your blessings because of our failure to ask.

Today, empower our Senators to seek Your wisdom and guidance. May they not depend only on their gifts and abilities, but remember that without Your involvement they labor in vain. May they strive to be Your ambassadors of renewal and reconciliation. Steady their hands to grasp freedom's torch and illuminate the darkness of our Nation and world.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GRASSLEY). The majority leader is recognized.

A BALANCED BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we begin this week by remembering a failed idea from the past—ObamaCare—and we will end by pass-

ing balanced budget legislation about the future.

Five years ago today, a partisan ObamaCare bill was signed into law over the objections of the American people. It was rushed through in defiance of the experts who warned it would result in higher costs, fewer choices, and broken promises for the middle class. And, tragically, that is just what we have seen.

Millions of Americans lost health plans they were promised they could keep, premiums spiked, deductibles skyrocketed, tax time became even more of a burden, and often a costlier one as well, and for too many, family doctors and trusted hospitals fell out of network.

All we have to do is listen to letters such as Karen's from Louisville to know that Americans deserve better than what ObamaCare has given them.

Karen was paying \$325 a month for her health insurance. But now, she says her premium has spiked to almost \$550 a month with a deductible well in excess of \$6,000. "I cannot afford this," Karen wrote, "but I do not have a choice. It scares me to think what will happen if I do get sick."

That is Karen's story, and it is hardly unique.

Every Member in this body should be striving for something better—something better—than the pain of ObamaCare. And we can. By passing a balanced budget that is about the future, we can leave ObamaCare's higher costs and broken promises where they belong—in the past—and start fresh with real health reform. That is just one of the many reasons for Senators who support the balanced budget now before us. It is a budget that recognizes serious fiscal and economic challenges that are facing our country and works to address them in a commonsense way.

Americans know that Washington can't tax away the challenges confronting us, and Americans know

Washington can't ignore away the problems confronting us, either. Americans also know that every dollar spent on interest for the growing national debt is essentially wasted. Every dollar spent on interest is one less dollar for Social Security or for helping those who truly need it or for tax relief.

That is why the balanced budget before us is premised on a simple truth—that Washington has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. I know this can be hard for some to acknowledge, but politicians have a duty to the American people to simply admit it. They owe it to the American people to explain why the kind of budget blueprints we have seen from the White House are just so totally unserious. President Obama's budgets skip the tough choices, keep spending more money we don't have, contain massive tax increases, and never balance—ever. They never balance—ever.

Contrast that to the budget before the Senate today. It balances, it does so without raising taxes, and it is the result of open and transparent committee work led by Chairman MIKE ENZI.

This budget is another example of the new Senate getting back to work for the American people. It is another example of the new Senate moving past failed ideas from the past, such as ObamaCare, and positioning America for the future instead.

This balanced budget is all about growing an economy that can work better for the middle class of today and leaving a more prosperous future to the middle class of tomorrow. It will also provide the procedural tools, via the budget reconciliation process, to bring an end to the nightmare of ObamaCare. That is something all of us should want.

So since our friends across the aisle have decided not to offer a budget of their own, I would invite them to join us—to join us in supporting the growth-oriented and balanced budget that is before us now.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S1675

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON
THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR
2016—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to S. Con. Res. 11.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 31, S. Con. Res. 11, a concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2016 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2017 through 2025.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON
THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the concurrent resolution.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 11) setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2016 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2017 through 2025.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time used for my opening statement not count against the budget resolution time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as the Republican leader mentioned, it is hard to believe that 5 years have gone by since we passed the Affordable Care Act—but it is true. It has been 5 years. We recall back to that cold winter day when we were able finally to get it done.

But to me it doesn't seem that long ago. The memories of what took place to get where we did to pass that are very fresh in my mind. It wasn't an easy feat. Presidents going back to Truman and Eisenhower had tried to pass legislation dealing with health care, and they were all unable to do it. So it was really a great accomplishment that Congress could pass this legislation.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that President Obama risked his Presidency by pushing for health care reform. It was really a defining moment for many people.

Republican opposition at the time was overwhelming. No matter what we as Democrats did or tried to do, there was nothing we could do to get Republicans to join us in giving health care to the American people, even though the original health care bill we passed was patterned after Republican proposals. So we worked hard, and we got it done. We pled for help, and we got none. Republicans simply were not interested in working with us to fix our Nation's health care system.

Outside the Capitol, a sophisticated and dishonest public relations campaign costing huge amounts of money was being waged against ObamaCare by political operatives, lobbyists, insurance companies, and many others. We pressed on, and we did the very best we could, and it was pretty good. Was it perfect? Of course not. No legislation is. But what we eventually passed was and still is good for America.

I was very surprised to hear my friend, the senior Senator from Kentucky, talk about a woman from Kentucky. That is very unusual, since 400,000 people in Kentucky today have insurance because of ObamaCare that they didn't have before.

Five years later, I am very proud of the work we did. I am just as proud today as I was when President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law. ObamaCare is reducing costs, expanding access, and protecting individuals with preexisting disabilities.

Look at just a few of the things it has done.

Some 16.4 million Americans now have quality health care coverage—16.4 million.

The United States has seen the largest decline in the uninsured rate—probably ever, but we will use just for purposes of illustration—in decades.

In the last 18 months, the uninsured rate for nonelderly adults has fallen by 35 percent. That is stunning.

Health care costs have grown at their slowest level in some 50 years.

Now listen to this. Patient safety initiatives are keeping Americans safe. Since we passed this legislation, the number of preventable deaths at hospitals and care centers has dropped by 50,000 people. That is 50,000 people who are alive today who wouldn't have been had it not been for ObamaCare. That is just one aspect of the people who are alive today because of ObamaCare who would not have been otherwise.

But for all of the incredible national statistics that are available, the best evidence that the Affordable Care Act is working can be found in our homes, our neighborhoods, and our communities.

This year in Nevada, ObamaCare is making a real difference in the lives of about 73,000 people who signed up for coverage through the health care insurance marketplace. Frankly, Nevada got off to a really slow start because they had a contract in the State with Xerox and they did such an awful job. The Republican Governor of the State of Nevada—I have applauded him in the past and I will do it again—was very courageous. He stepped forward and has made a huge difference in Nevada. Not only are Nevadans getting covered, but they are getting tax breaks, also. Some 65,000 Nevadans who selected a plan on the marketplace qualified for an average tax credit of \$242 per month. No matter what standard we use, that is real money in the pockets of Nevadans who are still recovering from the economic downturn because

of what happened on Wall Street. There are stories just like this all across America.

After 5 years, it is as clear as ever that the Affordable Care Act is working. Americans are benefiting from increased health coverage, lower costs, and improved efficiency.

Again, 16.4 million Americans have quality health coverage. Since 2013, the United States has seen the largest decline in the uninsured rate in decades. In the last 18 months, the uninsured rate for nonelderly adults has fallen by 35 percent. Health care costs have grown at their slowest rate in 50 years. Patient safety initiatives are keeping Americans safe. Since 2011, the number of preventable deaths at hospitals and care centers has dropped by 50,000.

The ranking member of the Budget Committee is on the floor today. One of the great things we do not talk much about in the Affordable Care Act is community health centers. The good man from Vermont, the junior Senator from Vermont, came to me and talked to me about community health centers. As a result of his advocacy, we put lots of money—about \$11 billion—in the Affordable Care Act for community health centers. It has changed the health care delivery system in America significantly. We must continue that program.

The Affordable Care Act, for all the reasons we have mentioned, is something that is really important. It is important that everyone understand how absolutely fantastic it was for the people of this country. After 5 years, it is clear it is working. Americans are benefiting from increased coverage, lower costs, and improved efficiency.

I invite my Republican colleagues to accept that ObamaCare is the law of the land. Put aside the unrealistic notions of repealing a law of which 16.4 million people now have health care. Are we going to just drop them, because the Republican plans would just basically drop them all?

Instead, Republicans should join with us to help even more Americans get the help they need. Perhaps, then, 5 years from now Democrats and Republicans can look back with pride, knowing that together we helped make a good law even better for all Americans.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I will begin by propounding some unanimous consent requests. I think these have been agreed to on both sides.

First, I ask unanimous consent that, for the duration of the Senate's consideration of S. Con. Res. 11, the majority and Democratic managers of the concurrent resolution, while seated or standing at the managers' desks, be permitted to deliver floor remarks, retrieve, review, and edit documents, and send email and other data communications from text displayed on wireless